



Combat Camera Imagery (Marv Lynchard)

JFACC Who's in Charge?

By J. L. WHITLOW

There is unanimity that the Armed Forces will fight as a joint team in the future. Each of the services has come a long way to make joint force a reality, but real difficulties remain in the area of command and control. It is time to take off the doctrinal blinders and look harder for the solutions. One concern is

we do not wage functional fights, but we demand functional excellence

command and control of joint air operations. The capabilities, flexibility, and multi-service character of aviation make a Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) important to most joint operations. Some say that a JFACC's actual responsibilities make the role more that of a coordinator. Regardless, there is likely to be a JFACC in most large joint operations. What then is the problem? Why do many dissent in reviewing joint doctrine on this subject? Why are CINCs unable to agree on a concept? The answer lies in understanding the

needs of joint commanders at all levels and building the proper dynamics into joint decisionmaking and tasking processes.

To gain some insight into possible solutions, one must first understand that we simply do not fight in a functionally centralized fashion. This is evidenced by the Army-Air Force AirLand Battle concept and the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) concept. Neither concept is about organization; rather they involve teamwork and combined arms philosophies. The Navy's surface, sub-surface, and aerospace systems are tightly woven into a combined arms warfighting capability. Service commanders must master a range of joint and component fires to decide a battle and shape the next one. It follows that commanders must have adequate authority to direct actions necessary to accomplish their missions.

We do not wage functional fights, but we demand functional excellence. That search for excellence requires striking a balance between centralized, sub-optimized, functional efficiency and decentralized authority that subordinate commanders need in order to succeed. The JFACC identity crisis, the *coordinator* versus the *commander*, is nothing more than different views of that balance.

Everyone agrees that a JFACC is indispensable. But instead of fashioning the organization desired, we appear to be forcing existing, unwieldy processes to work. For various reasons, there is little innovative thinking about procedures and processes that could solve legitimate warfighting concerns. It is time to stop arguing and to start

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looking at the specific areas where progress can be achieved, namely, apportionment, targeting, a concept for a purple JFACC, and a vision of the future.

Apportionment

What passes for apportionment guidance is not *guidance* at all. It is interesting to note that the apportionment process found in joint doctrine to produce guidance was not used in Operation Desert Storm. How should the process work? What's wrong with the methodology? What kind of process can be proposed that provides guidance from a joint force commander (JFC)? At present the process goes something like this:

- ▼ the JFACC proposes apportionment to the JFC by percentage and/or priority that should be devoted to various air operations and/or geographic areas

- ▼ the JFC approves apportionment which is usually specified in terms of percentages allotted between anti-air warfare (AAW), close air support (CAS), and air interdiction (AI)

- ▼ the JFACC then develops air tasking orders (ATOs) and attack target lists using assets apportioned to AI.

At face value this seems to be a reasonable process, but it does not really produce guidance in a JTF environment. It is fraught with several problems, including percentages.

Percentages Don't Work. First, when determining the percentage of air assets to task for the CAS, AAW, or AI role, the decision is mostly a function of the force list, and not of how a JFC wants to fight the war. In other words, many aircraft are only employed in a certain role. Hence, attempts to provide guidance in terms of a *percentage* are often nothing more than an approximation of the make-up of the force list, and not guidance on warfighting. But to arrive at percentages a JFACC must almost write the ATO in advance and, to get requisite information, make preliminary decisions on targeting priorities and the allocation of assets which may or may not be in agreement with a JFC. When such effort goes into an ATO, it is very difficult to change without completely rewriting the plan, and a complete mindset change by JFACC planners. Finally, percentages are a very poor way for a JFC to articulate guidance. For example, while he may

have a "gut feel" that CAS should have a high priority, he is very unlikely to disagree with the *percentage* of total sorties dedicated to it. The important thing to a JFC is *not* whether there is 23 percent or 33 percent CAS, but whether attack aircraft are available when ground commanders need them. A JFC should state guidance and priorities in terms of how he wants the war fought and leave percentages to analysts.

Guidance. Most real JFC guidance for an air war will probably be off-line and not about percentages among AAW, CAS, and AI. A JFC knows that airspace must be defended by AAW and CAS must be provided as needed. A JFC's on-line guidance should recognize the relatively constant requirements for AAW and CAS. This leaves AI. JFC guidance will better influence the total air war effort if a "main effort" is designated (the most important thing the force is attempting to accomplish that day) and associated priorities within the AI category are provided. For example, early in a campaign when a JFC believes the force should focus on an enemy's air capability, the priority is offensive counter air (OCA). In a new phase strategic targets may be more important and AI—theater air interdiction—is the focus. As an operation matures the ability to maneuver on the ground will be a priority and the focus will be shifted to shaping the battlefield or battlefield air interdiction (BAI).

A primary factor in any sequence similar to the one described above will be a JFC's sense of phasing. By not forcing the *apportionment process* to give a JFC a meaningful way to provide guidance appropriate for each phase, the system abdicates that responsibility to a JFACC. In the fog of war, when decisions are less than obvious, this process failure pits one component against others for priority and provides for little more than a source of additional friction. The remaining question to be answered is how the guidance for joint force air operations should be changed.

Givens, Main Effort, and Priorities. Forget percentages, neither component commanders nor a JFACC need to be preoccupied with arbitrary percentages as aviation plans are transformed into an ATO. Instead one should adopt a different way of thinking about the air effort, and thus a different approach to articulating JFC guidance.

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Defensive AAW should be a given. If threatened by enemy air, a joint force must provide sufficient assets and a viable plan to protect them. If the threat is real, there is no higher priority. There is no need for percentages; a JFACC must ensure success.

CAS should be a given. Is it that simple? The answer is yes—from the perspective of JFC guidance. If forces are heavily engaged on the battlefield and need CAS, the world's superpower should be able to provide it. While guidance is simple, planning and conduct are not. Dedicating a percentage of the force to CAS will not ensure success or comfort a commander. There must be a viable plan. Ground force commanders and a JFACC must have a common understanding of the following points:

CAS flow plan

- ▼ *scheduled*—capability (not numbers) synchronized with ground scheme
- ▼ *alert*—prepared to surge with unexpected
- ▼ *divert*—based on specified parameters

CAS command/control/communication structure

- ▼ viable, in place, and understood
- ▼ as uniform as it can be made, yet allowing each of the services to fight the way they are organized, trained, and equipped

Divert criteria

- ▼ consciously decide what authority a JFACC has to divert dual role aircraft from or between interdiction missions

- ▼ consciously decide what missions are not to be diverted unless directed by higher authority

Apportionment guidance should be provided for AI under two rubrics:

- ▼ *main effort*—the most important task now being accomplished by the entire force

- ▼ *priority*—for air interdiction among OCA (such as airfield strikes), AI (strategic targets), and BAI (targets in ground commander's AO).

[AI here pertains only to theater-level targets, which conflicts with the joint definition. Either a new term is needed for theater targets or an amended definition for AI as suggested. Also, the term BAI must be entered in the joint lexicon as discussed below.]

A predominant relationship exists between priorities and the shifting phases of a campaign, for example:

Phase I—*create air superiority*

- ▼ main effort JFACC—kill enemy air power
- ▼ priorities OCA, AI, BAI

Phase II—*shape the theater*

- ▼ main effort JFACC—kill enemy C² and logistics systems
- ▼ priorities AI, OCA, BAI

Phase III—*shape the battlefield*

- ▼ main effort Army, Marine, or Navy AOs
- ▼ priorities BAI, AI, OCA.

As campaign phases blend together, flexible priorities could optimize air efforts for the changing nature of the conflict.

In sum, it is senseless to have a JFACC accept input, make assumptions, write a skeleton ATO, apply the force list to it, arrive at percentages, propose them to a JFC, and have a JFC feed those percentages back to the force—calling it apportionment guidance. There is no need to build a “percentage box” for a JFACC in order to ensure he is fighting the air war in accordance with JFC wishes. The onus is on a JFC.

A JFC must provide a good commander's intent to the entire JTF, with all that entails: a sense of phasing, perceived end state, etc. As for the air war, he must build a force that is capable of making air superiority and CAS a given. Then on a day to day basis, he must provide air apportionment guidance in terms of a main effort that applies to the entire JTF, and to priorities for air interdiction among BAI, AI, and OCA. With this type of guidance, a JFACC can fight the theater air war and ensure *unity of effort* throughout the theater, with air-capable component commanders focusing on their areas of operation and providing synergy to the joint campaign.

Targeting Process-es

The term *process-es* is not a typo. It is used to suggest a concept that is frequently lost in orchestrating joint air operations. Anyone who works in the world of joint air operations can recite the targeting cycle by rote: guidance, target development, weaponing, force application (ATO), force execution, and combat assessment; then the



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Navy F/A-18 Hornet
landing aboard
USS America.

cycle begins again. No one can match the ability of the Armed Forces in targeting an enemy strategically or operationally. There are extraordinary national assets and advanced technologies that make everything seem possible.

Yet when you look closely at the task of targeting from a complete theater perspective, you find that this simple cycle is not carried out at the theater level alone. It is done on various levels of command throughout the theater, in various areas of operation, at various speeds, and with various degrees of sophistication. Hence, it is not a single, simple process at all. When you envelope all *process-es* with a very centralized approach to targeting, it is somewhat akin to driving a theater's worth of round pegs into one small, sub-optimized, square hole.

To resolve this dilemma we must respond not only to interdiction needs of JFCs—which is done pretty well—but also corps-level ground force and surface commanders. Then we must link *process-es* at the right points to prioritize correctly, target responsively, and allow the services to *fight the way they are organized, trained, and equipped*. Third, we must develop the hardware and software capabilities that will make this possible.

Bring Back the Concept of Battlefield Air Interdiction. The methods of addressing a corps-level commander's need for interdiction in his area of operations (AO) are not very clear. Marines talk of MAGTF and a need for *direct support sorties* which are primarily CAS and

interdiction missions flown within the MAGTF AO. The term *direct support sorties* has been coined basically to frame the argument about “who's in charge” of their tasking and control. Direct support sorties apply to both CAS and interdiction missions within the Marine AO.

The Navy's need to conduct air operations at sea has long been accepted. But as a result this need has been widely ignored in joint air operations, and interest is usually expressed in terms of how much they can contribute to the joint effort. The notion that the Navy also has a need for *interdiction* sorties, and that the sea and the littoral may be an *area of operations* for a naval component commander, has not generally been a joint consideration. This has been true except for operations within an Amphibious Objective Area (AOA), a recognized amphibious concept.

A corps commander has no direct way of obtaining a level of interdiction support by fixed wing aircraft in an AO. Instead targets must be nominated to a JFACC or JFC staff, then compete for priority with theater-level targets. Perhaps this explains the Army's great helicopter capabilities and Army Attack Missile Systems (ATACMS). At least the Army has some control over these capabilities.

Notwithstanding control, something is missing from the realm of joint warfighting. Each of the preceding descriptions was about *battlefield air interdiction* (BAI), but the concept does not exist in joint doctrine. The term does not appear in the joint lexicon. In order to add clarity to the joint air tasking process, we must promote the concept of *battlefield air interdiction* and adopt the term. JFCs need it to properly influence the battle.

Who's in Charge of Interdiction? With an adequate vocabulary it is possible to ask who's in charge of targeting various parts of the battlefield. For theater-level targets JFCs are obviously in charge and a JFACC is probably the best placed to coordinate an attack. JFCs shape the theater and try to deliver the knockout punch. However, when JFCs assign missions to subordinate commanders and give them AOs, those commanders should be *in charge* of targeting in their AOs. Yet the current process compels corps-level commanders to *nominate* targets up the chain to JFCs for *validation* and *prioritization*.



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Marine F/A-18 at Aviano Air Base with Air Force AWACS in background.

What does target validation imply here? If it means corps-level commanders may not know what a valid fixed wing target is, then staffs have an education problem that needs to be addressed. If it means that only JFC staffs have adequate information and intelligence to determine if a target is valid, then information and intelligence systems are inadequate and must be fixed. But I suspect that it means neither of these things; rather, it is confusion over *who's in charge* of this segment of the battlefield and the victimization by a process that does not support commanders in their AOs.

And what is target prioritization? I do not believe that it means a JFC will prioritize targets in a subordinate commander's AO. However, if it implies that BAI targets must always compete with theater targets for attention, BAI will usually come up short. This will likely remain true until such time as the ground war goes to hell in a handbasket, or the importance of mission success in that AOs take on theater-level significance. While this may be an exaggeration, my point is that we have a clumsy system in place that prioritizes aviation-related targets only at JFC-level. We need a true *purple* system that prioritizes theater-level targets for theater commanders, allows BAI-level targets to be prioritized by

commanders who are in charge of their associated AOs, and apports by prioritizing under three interdiction categories: theater air interdiction, battlefield air interdiction, and offensive counter air.

A Purple JFACC

At first blush it seems that a JFACC should inherently head a purple organization, but there are several reasons why this is usually not the case. First of all joint doctrine embraces the notion of dual hatting. It is stated that a JFC will "normally designate a JFACC from the component that has both the preponderance of air assets in the joint operations area and the capability to command and control joint air operations." Conflict of interest in a dual hat situation is inevitable—if not in deed, certainly in perception, which is therefore detrimental to the joint force. You can argue that a JFC can augment the JFACC organization with personnel from other services and make it joint, or that it is really the only way to organize since components own all the necessary C² assets; but you cannot argue that it is *purple*.

Another factor is that the air tasking and C² system used in joint operations is generally not joint, but Air Force. It was not

intended to be joint, but rather to support an Air Operations Center (AOC), a highly centralized Air Force C² system that works well for a single component. But as a theater matures, its complexity increases. While separate AOs are created for various components, the system does not allow either horizontal and vertical communication or targeting dynamics. The Computer-Assisted Force Management System—employed in Desert Shield/Desert Storm—as well as the Contingency Tactical Air Control Automated Planning System (CTAPS) are both single-host computer systems that do not support interactive data base exchange or off-site direct ATO input.

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that can focus on aviation
requirements of all service
components

Progress is being made in this area. CTAPS has been designated a joint program and a lot of effort is going into developing follow-on versions of its software. Work is also underway on joint requirements for ATO. Such advances are significant, but doctrine must be based on existing capabilities. Thus we must make the joint air C² system purple since it was not designed that way.

What about JFACC organization? Three CINCs have come up with two different JFACC concepts that attempt to force jointness on what is basically an Air Force system. Both approaches have problems. The Atlantic/Pacific (LANT/PAC) concept of operations (CONOPS) comes closer to creating an organization that is truly purple. I personally fought hard for this concept, but it has a down side. Although the internal staffing is joint, it still maintains a dual hat approach at the top (that is, the JFACC is normally a service component commander). And, while the organization's line numbers are assigned to each component to be filled, it is always a "pickup" game. There are no individuals permanently assigned. Thus each operation differs; the preoperation training burden is high and not well suited for crisis employment. Purple? Almost, but it may not meet our needs.

U.S. European Command (EUCOM), in contrast, has published a JFACC concept peculiar to that theater. Aware that there may not be time to assemble a pickup team, EUCOM augments the Air Force AOC with liaison officers and weapon system experts

from other services. While it is obvious why this is done, it is also clearly not an attempt to create a purple organization.

What is the answer? Is a purple organization required? I believe we need an organization that can focus on aviation requirements of all service components. We need an advocate—outside the Beltway—for a truly joint air C⁴I system, so as not to create one in the same agonizing fashion that joint doctrine is developed. This demands far more than asking components how many sorties they need tomorrow. It is a matter of setting up air space, molding a joint air tasking system, and establishing an environment in which a JFC can accomplish the mission and the services can fight effectively the way they are organized, trained, and equipped.

It is time to stand up a purple JFACC in each theater. The associated operating doctrine for each theater, however, has to be worldwide to facilitate the rapid introduction of forces. Though it will not be a full-time job, there should be permanent names next to every JFACC position and the individuals concerned should be trained. Doctrine must facilitate joint air operations whether or not a JFACC is dual hatted or designated from outside of the joint force components. The structure should be based on LANT/PAC CONOPS which is well conceived. Its individual members must be expert and train with each JFACC iteration in theater. In small operations or at the beginning of campaigns, where it makes sense to dual hat service component commanders, such individuals will join appropriate component staffs. In large operations, it might be advisable to stand up a JFACC that is distinct from all joint force components. The advent of a purple JFACC will free component commanders to focus on their missions and optimize the things which each component does best.

The Vision

The future is one in which the joint air C⁴I system is real time and completely interactive, not single host; component air C⁴I systems are the same or fully interoperable; controlled input is made to ATO from off site and various sources; all services adopt air tasking methodologies that are similar to the joint

system; and every air capable component may host a JFACC or alternately interact efficiently with a JFACC on a real time basis.

A notional scenario under such a system might see the Navy arriving first on the scene of a crisis, conducting initial air operations using an ATO and tasking system compatible with the joint air C⁴I system. The ATO is initially written on a carrier and then on a command ship as the Naval Expeditionary Force expands. As units arrive in theater and are brought to bear, the ATO address list grows to include them. At some point a JFC is named and an officer from within the naval component is designated JFACC. Then the marines kick in the door and come ashore. The land AOR starts to expand. A Marine air command and control system is created and works well with a JFACC afloat. Direct support sorties for the Marines are written into the ATO from forces ashore, yet they are deconflicted and supported with tankers by a JFACC afloat. This could all appear on a single ATO, or applicable sections might be selected.

In another phase a JFC and his staff come ashore to coordinate with the American embassy and host nation. A decision is made to designate the Marine ACE commander as JFACC because of his proximity to a JFC. JFACC cadre (from the standing theater JFACC) come ashore. JFACC responsibilities shift to Marine Allied Command, Europe (ACE)—which is not a big deal since the ATO and joint air operations continue. Naval force direct support sorties now are written into the ATO from afloat and deconflicted ashore. Liaison officers are added to the JFACC staff as new capabilities and units arrive in theater.

The theater then expands as the Marines move out. Army forces are present in theater and operational. Boundaries are drawn and separate AOs for land forces unfold. The Air Force AOC stands up. Marine expeditionary airfields become operational and ACE relocates with the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commander. A decision is made to transfer JFACC responsibilities to the Air Force component commander. Again, there is no big deal, the ATO and joint air operations continue. The big guns are there and each component focuses on its AO. The test is that through all this time B-52s operating from Guam received the ATO and struck the

correct targets for a JFC, oblivious to where JFACC responsibility rested in any given phase. Each component contributed to the joint air effort while fighting the war in its respective AOR according to its own organization, training, and equipment.

Who's in charge? Operationally, *anyone* can be. The vision is simple: any component can supply a JFACC; systems are interactive and interoperable; components contribute efficiently to the joint air effort; and components fight in terms of their own organization, training, and equipment. In reality, until the next war breaks out, *everyone* is in charge. It will take a lot of work to create a truly joint air C⁴I system. We must look to what can be fixed now, like apportionment, targeting, and organization. But such an effort will be in vain unless a vision of the future is articulated and differences among the services are turned into joint force advantages. While there is real merit in a rainbow of service traditions, assets, and capabilities, that spectrum must be predominantly purple. This is not that difficult to grasp in concept, but it will take time and tenacity to achieve in practice. It is worth the effort by all of us to make it happen.

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